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Crayola Crayons Have Been Helping Children Color for Generations

For over 100 years, the Crayola company has made colorful tools for children to express their artistic skills. *Transcript of radio broadcast: 08 July 2007*

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VOICE ONE:

Welcome to THIS IS AMERICA in VOA Special English. I'm Barbara Klein.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Steve Ember. This week, we tell about the history of one of the most popular and colorful toy products in America. Generations of American children have grown up coloring and drawing with crayons made by the Crayola company. These small sticks of color are also popular around the world.

(MUSIC)

(SOUND)

Andrew:

Hi, my name is Andrew Bracken and I am six years old. I like to draw neighborhoods and cities. Right now I am drawing an ice cream store. My favorite crayon colors are: pink is my first, purple is my second and blue is my last.

VOICE ONE:

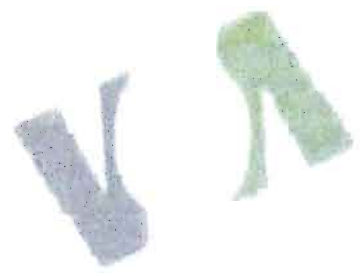
That was Andrew Bracken from Arlington, Virginia. He is one of many children in America who likes to draw with Crayola crayons. Many people use these fun drawing tools, but not everyone knows their history and how they are made.

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The story of Crayola began in eighteen sixty-four. Joseph Binney started a company in the state of New York called Peekskill Chemical Works. The factory made products such as paints, dyes, and charcoal. Joseph Binney later asked his son Edwin Binney and another family member, C. Harold Smith, to work with him.

VOICE TWO:



Binney & Smith Founders

In eighteen eighty-five Joseph Binney retired. Edwin Binney and C. Harold Smith decided to become business partners and changed the name of the company to Binney & Smith. The company made products like red oxide, a chemical used to give color to the red paint used for painting barn buildings on farms. Peekskill chemists also had

an important role in how modern cars look. The first car tires were a white color because of the zinc oxide in the rubber. Peekskill experts learned that adding carbon black to tires not only made them darker but also made them much stronger.

VOICE ONE:

In nineteen hundred the company started making slate school pencils in their factory in Easton, Pennsylvania. Binney & Smith started listening carefully to teachers who wanted better materials to use in their classrooms. The company soon made the first dustless chalk sticks for writing on school blackboards. A few years later the company decided to produce safe and low cost wax crayons, which are coloring sticks that can be made out of wax, chalk or charcoal. In fact, "crayon" comes from the French word for pencil.

VOICE TWO:



A box of Crayola crayons from 1903

Crayons were not a new art material, but good quality ones were costly to buy. It was Edwin Binney's wife Alice who invented the product name Crayola. The first part of the name comes from "craie" the French word for the material chalk. The second part comes from "ola" in the word "oleaginous" which means having to do with, or containing, oil.

Today, you can buy boxes of Crayola crayons with more than one hundred colors. But the first box of Crayolas only had eight colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, brown and black.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

If you want to understand how these famous colorful sticks are made, you can visit the Crayola Factory visitor's center in Easton, Pennsylvania. The real factory where Crayola crayons are produced is no longer open to the public. But at the visitors center you can see older versions of the machines that make crayons. Listen as one of the factory's guides tells about the company.

(SOUND)

CHARLIE DOHERTY:

Hi, I'm Charlie Doherty. I work here at the Crayola Factory making crayons...well, showing people how we make crayons and markers. Crayola was founded, the crayon part of the company, in nineteen-oh-three. In two thousand three we had our one-hundredth anniversary. We were the first to package eight different colors back in nineteen-oh-three. We had an eight pack. You know how many colors we make now? Guess! How many?

One hundred and a half. Yeah, they come in a tower.

VOICE TWO:

Charlie Doherty can also show you how the many machines work that produce crayons. He starts by pouring hot paraffin wax that has been colored with pigment onto a special table. The hot liquid pours into one thousand two hundred thin container molds that are the shape of a crayon. Then, Mister Doherty runs a scraper over the table to make sure the wax is evenly placed. As the wax cools, it keeps the shape of the crayon forms.

Cold water helps cool the crayons more quickly. Next, he carefully takes the cooled crayons out of the forms. The ones that break or do not have perfect tips get melted again into the wax.

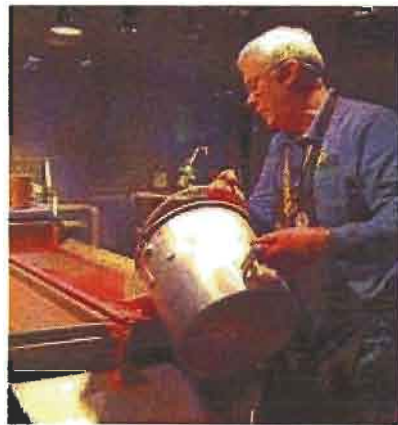


Photo: Dana Deming

Charlie Doherty pouring liquid paraffin wax to make crayons

VOICE ONE:

Charlie Doherty then shows the labeling machine that wraps small squares of paper around the crayon using sticky glue made from cornstarch. The paper helps strengthen the crayon so it does not break easily when used. The labels also give the name of the color.

Before these machines existed, local farmers put the colored labels on the crayons by hand. It was a good way for these families to make money during the winter. If you visit this factory, you can try to roll and glue the paper on a newly made crayon. It is not as easy as it looks! Charlie Doherty says the farmers used to be able to put the paper labels on ten to twelve crayons a minute.



Photo: Dana Deming

Next, there is a machine that puts crayons into small boxes made out of cardboard paper.

(SOUND)

The machine sorts the crayons so that every box has one of every color.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

The sorting machine that puts crayons into their boxes

A whole history could be written about Crayola's names for its many colors. Over the years Crayola has renamed three of its colors to be more "politically correct" and not risk insulting some groups of people. These include "Prussian blue" which became "midnight blue," and "Indian red" which became "chestnut." In nineteen sixty-two the company changed the color "flesh" to "peach." The Crayola Web site says this was partly a result of the civil rights movement in the United States during the nineteen-sixties.

VOICE ONE:

It might surprise you to learn how seriously some people take their crayons. In nineteen ninety Crayola decided to retire eight colors including "raw umber," "maize" and "lemon yellow." The company did not expect that many adults who grew up with those colors would be very upset. Some people even protested in front of the Crayola headquarters. People organized themselves into protest groups like "RUMP." This stands for the "Raw UMBER and Maize Preservation Society." Another protest group was called "The Society to Save Lemon Yellow."

Crayola did not return the eight old colors permanently. But they did create special edition metal boxes of crayons that included the newly retired colors. They sold hundreds of thousands of those tins.

VOICE TWO:

You might be wondering who names all these colors. Crayola has

three main ways for finding new names. Sometimes the company uses a book from the United States Commerce Department called "Color: Universal Language and Dictionary of Names." This book is used by experts in industries like biology, botany, and home designing. Crayola also gets names from colors used by artists.

VOICE ONE:

Sometimes Crayola asks its workers for color ideas. Their suggestions include "pig pink" and "blue bell." Crayola has even asked its buyers for color name ideas. In nineteen ninety-three Crayola held a competition for new names. Adrienne Watral was six years old at the time. She named an orange crayon after her favorite food, "macaroni and cheese." Eighty-nine-year-old Mildred Sampson picked the name "purple mountain majesty." This phrase comes from a famous song about America, but it is also the perfect name for a color.

Crayola recently started writing the names of each color in Spanish as well as French. So, now when you pick up the blue color "cornflower" you can improve your language skills. Cornflower is "azul aciano" in Spanish and "bluet" in French.

VOICE TWO:

Crayola is not the only company that makes crayons. For example, the Swiss company Caran d'Ache makes many kinds of high quality art products. These include colorful drawing sticks like oil pastels and wax pastels. This company's products are mostly for professional artists and designers.

The company Dixon Ticonderoga makes Prang crayons out of wax and also out of soybean oil. Some people buy soy crayons because the colors are very bright and are good for the environment. These other companies might make similar products. But Crayola crayons have their own special place in the popular imagination of generations of Americans.

We leave you with the words of Daisy Bracken. She can tell you exactly which Crayola colors are special to her.

(SOUND)

Daisy:

My name is Daisy and I am four years old. Sometimes I color with crayons. I like indigo, green and purple and pink and red and I like yellow...and green...and brown....

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

Our program was written and produced by Dana Demange. I'm Barbara Klein.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Steve Ember. You can see pictures of crayons being made at our Web site, voaspecialenglish.com. You can also find transcripts and audio archives of our programs. Join us again next week for THIS IS AMERICA in VOA Special English.

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